DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 326 957 EA 022 509

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TITLE Academic Partnerships Reach New Heights.
PUB DATE Aug 89
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cooperative Planning; Cooperative Programs; Educational Cooperation; Higher Education; Information Networks; Secondary Education; *Telecommunications; *Teleconferencing; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *California; *Partnerships in Education

ABSTRACT

Response to a request for a proposals workshop presented through a statewide satellite teleconference by the California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP) is described and evaluated in this report. A goal of CAPP is to develop cooperative efforts between higher education and the public schools. Outcomes of the teleconference included a four-fold increase in the number of participants, solicitation of quality proposals, and an overall positive evaluation by participants. Planning expenses were higher but were cost-effective in relation to improved outcomes and lowered costs for participants. (LMI)

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Responding to tomorrow's challenges may well require trying new strategies. The California Academic Partnership Program is exploring uses of teleconferencing technology in its responses to the challenges of reforming secondary curricula and developing collaborative efforts between California's schools and postsecondary institutions.

California's Legislature created the California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP) to develop cooperative efforts between the state's colleges and universities and the public schools to improve the academic quality of the public secondary schools. The program seeks to improve the preparation of all students for college, and assigns priority to students in groups which are underrepresented in postsecondary education. CAPP also seeks to develop partnership projects throughout California, to provide schools in rural, urban, and suburban areas with access to its services. The California State University (CSU) administers CAPP with the advice of an Advisory Committee which includes representatives of teachers, postsecondary faculty members, and all segments of the state's educational community.

Since its initiation in 1984, CAPP has conducted two "cycles" of grants, and has provided two- or three-year grants to twenty-eight projects which address improvements in the secondary school curriculum and the ability of students to benefit from these improvements. CAPP also provided continuing support for two "Showcase Projects," selected from the first cycle's projects, to model the accomplishments of maturing partnerships. (CAPP also funds statewide diagnostic testing projects in mathematics and writing.)

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For its first two funding cycles, CAPP invited prospective applicants for curriculum development project grants to attend one of two proposal workshops, one in northern California, and one in southern California. These workshops were used to present CAPP's Request for Proposals (RFP), which had been distributed widely by mail, and to provide opportunities for applicants to ask questions for clarification.

Deciding on a Teleconference

As CAPP approached its third cycle of funding, for the 1990-93 period, Executive Director Deborah Hancock and the Advisory Committee considered ways in which they could strengthen their process of inviting proposals and selecting partnership projects for funding. They determined, first, that they should offer small "planning grants," designed to provide prospective partners with resources for preparing proposals for three-year partnership projects. They also wanted to ensure that schools in all areas of California would have equal access to the program, broaden awareness of CAPP and its objectives, and encourage the development of high-quality proposals.

They determined that a "live" satellite teleconference could serve these purposes. With satellite communications, CAPP could make a presentation of its RFP and objectives accessible simultaneously throughout the state—and retain valued opportunities for interactive discussion—without requiring any interested educators to travel to distant workshop locations.

CAPP's studies revealed that satellite teleconferencing had become an important tool for California's schools and other public agencies. "Uplink" services were available from the CSU campuses at Chico and Sacramento, public television station KPBS-TV (located at CSU San Diego), and the Educational Television Network (ETN), in the Los Angeles County Office of Education. Each year, these sites use satellite communications for statewide distribution of

hundreds of hours of telconferences, and Instructional Television Fixed Services (ITFS) systems for regional distribution of thousands of hours of college courses.

Extensive "downlink" facilities have been developed by public schools throughout the state. The California State Department of Education has determined recently that at least 1,000 school sites have the facilities to receive satellite signals either on their own grounds, or through nearby district, county offices, or colleges. A growing number of schools receive satellite signals through broadcast, ITFS, or cable systems which relay the signals from a reception dish to the school.

Finally, CAPP learned that California's Department of General Services had recently convened a Task Force on Interactive Teleconferencing in State Government to project the public sector's uses of this technology and recommend policies to guide future uses. The task force's recommendations are expected to point to increased uses of teleconferencing as a cost-effective alternative to travel.

Despite these high levels of use of teleconferencing by California's educational community, CAPP had only limited guidance for planning a teleconference or projecting participation in such an event. For example, CAPP found no indication that an RFP workshop had been presented through a satellite teleconference. The Advisory Committee nevertheless decided to proceed with their plans for a teleconference, to hire a teleconference coordinator to assist in this project, and to document their experiences for evaluation and sharing with other interested agencies.

Planning the Teleconference

A planning team determined that the CAPP teleconference's basic format would include one hour for presentation of the RFP, followed by one hour for presentation of the two current Showcase Projects. Both sessions would include ample opportunities for participants to ask questions, by telephone. (The questions and responses would be heard by all participants.) The teleconference's title would be *Planning Your Partnership*.

Once these key dimensions of the teleconference had been decided, the planning team selected CSU Sacramento's University Media Services as the uplink site, recruited members of the Advisory Committee and CAPP staff as panelists for the RFP workshop, recruited key persons in the two Showcase Projects as panelists for the second half of the teleconference, and assigned the teleconference coordinator to serve as moderator.

Both sessions of the teleconference then were fully scripted, to guide the panelists in addressing all key points. The planners arranged for CSU Chancellor Ann Reynolds and California Assemblywoman Teresa Hughes (the author of the CAPP legislation) to record brief statements introducing CAPP and its objectives. Brief video "inserts" also were produced to illustrate activities of the Showcase Projects in Santa Ana and Watsonville, California. Finally, computer-generated, alphanumeric displays were prepared as titles, summaries of main points, and credits, and publications and other visual materials were selected for use during the panel presentations.

The planners also were busy registering teleconference reception sites. They invited all of California's public secondary schools (grades 7-12) and colleges, by mail, to register as reception sites. Even though CAPP offered no compensation for these services, eighty-seven sites eventually registered. These included twenty-six California Community Colleges, twenty-four schools and

school districts, eighteen county offices of education, thirteen California State University campuses, two University of California campuses, and four others.

The planners then mailed a teleconference brochure which invited participants to register at a nearby reception site, and asked site managers to report the respective numbers of registered participants. In this manner, 1,000 persons registered as participants. The planners then shipped the appropriate number of information packets to each site, for local distribution to the participants on the day of the teleconference. Each packet included a copy of the RFP (which had been distributed widely a month earlier), a booklet, *Partnership Resource Guide, 1989*, with information about CAPP and the Showcase Projects, and a Participants' Evaluation Form.

With these preparations, the panelists assembled for a rehearsal in the CSU, Sacramento studios a few hours prior to the teleconference. This session included viewing of the video inserts and graphic displays, discussion of the sequence of their individual presentations, and plans for responding to questions from the participants. Although some panelists admitted to mild nervousness, but they soon realized that the extensive planning had reduced the likelihood of surprises, and relaxed to enjoy their experience. The teleconference proceeded essentially as planned. Later analysis revealed that 80% of the two-hour session was devoted to presentations, and that 20% of the time was used for participants' questions and panelists' responses.

Follow-up activities included (a) distributing video recordings of the teleconference and related printed materials, in response to requests, (b) editing the teleconference recording—primarily to excise the time-sensitive RFP workshop—to yield a video presentation on CAPP and the two Showcase Projects, and (c) preparing a detailed case study of the teleconference.

Evaluating the Teleconference

The evaluation of the teleconference addressed four issues: (a) the extent to which the teleconference reached educators throughout California with information about CAPP's RFP, its objectives, and the experiences of the two Showcase Projects, (b) the extent to which the teleconference resulted in proposals of high quality, (c) the cost-effectiveness of the teleconference, and (d) other outcomes or products of the teleconference.

The Reach of the Teleconference. As indicated above, the *Planning Your Partnership* teleconference attracted 1,000 participants in eighty-seven locations throughout California. These figures, which are extraordinarily high, from all accounts, compare with participation in the second funding cycle's grant proposal workshops, which served 264 educators, at "north and south" locations. This four-fold increase in the number of participants provided strong evidence of the benefits of satellite teleconferencing technology.

The Impact on the Quality of Proposals. Following the teleconference, and prior to the announced deadline, CAPP received seventy-four proposals for planning grants. Because this funding cycle offered planning grants for the first time, this number of proposals could not be compared directly with the slightly greater numbers received in previous cycles. Nevertheless, the proposals that were received were rated at least equal in quality to proposals received in previous cycles, and all proposals were received before the deadline. This suggests that presenting the RFP workshop through a teleconference had no negative effects on the quality of proposals, and (since earlier cycles received several late proposals, which had to be disqualified) might have contributed to awareness of the importance of meeting the proposal deadline.

Participants' Responses to the Teleconference. The planners, panelists, and staff eagerly awaited feedback from the participants, to determine how they had received the teleconference. The participants' evaluation form included two open-ended items, two "yes-no" items, and twenty-six Likert-type scale items, and an invitation to add comments in the margins. Despite the rather lengthy form, and the lack of any incentive or reward for filling it out, nearly ten percent of the participants completed and returned the form, for a "fair" return rate. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive:

- 77-80% of the respondents rated the reception/viewing facilities "good" or "very good";
- 67-72% rated the call-in sessions "good" or "very good";
- 98% rated the information packet "useful" or "very useful" (44% would have preferred to receive this packet before the teleconference, while 50% said it was "OK" to receive it at the teleconference);
- the usefulness of the RFP session received positive ratings from 86% of the respondents, while the usefulness of the Showcase Projects session received positive ratings from 55%;
- the interest level was rated positively by 71% (RFP session) and 65% (Showcase Projects session);
- the clarity level received positive ratings from 75% (RFP session) and 55% (Showcase Projects session);
- the pace of the sessions were rated as "fast-moving" or "acceptable" by 87% (RFP session) and 83% (Showcase Projects session);
- comparing *Planning Your Partnership* with other grant proposal workshops they had attended, respondents consistently rated it higher in "convenience" (75%), "good use of time" (65%), "good information" (74%), and "interactive" (58%); and, finally,

- when asked whether they would attend another CAPP teleconference, fully 90% of the respondents said "yes."

These responses, and the positive responses to the open-ended items, indicated that *Planning Your Partnership* was a great success. Still, in their responses to the open-ended items, and in the form's margins, respondents offered dozens of suggestions for improvement. These suggestions, which were too diverse to summarize here, reveal educators' high expectations of teleconferences and other conferences and workshops, and their readiness to communicate those expectations. CAPP will respond to those suggestions in designing future teleconferences and in-person conferences.

Cost-effectiveness of the Teleconference. CAPP's expenses for the *Planning Your Partnership* teleconference were several times those of the previous, in-person grant proposal workshops, totalling $60/participant, or about three times the per-participant cost of the conventional workshops. This added cost yielded a four-fold increase in the number of participants (as described above), superior presentations (as indicated by the respondents' evaluations), a publication (*Partnership Resource Guide, 1989*), a video presentation on CAPP and the Showcase Projects, and detailed documentation of the teleconference experience. These outcomes alone might well justify the cost of *Planning Your Partnership*, but the principal benefit of the teleconference undoubtedly was an apparent, substantial reduction in the costs of participation. While data on the teleconference participants' travel costs and lost work time are unavailable, these costs are presumed to be markedly less than the parallel costs of attending one of two conventional workshops. A strong likelihood exists that these savings greatly exceeded $40/participant, making *Planning Your Partnership* highly cost-effective.

Conclusions

The California Academic Partnership Program regards the *Planning Your Partnership* as a very successful first use of satellite teleconferencing technology. As CAPP and California educators gain practical experience with teleconferences, and as the number of reception sites continues to increase, CAPP will be able to use this technology more and more effectively in pursuing its program mandate. In fact, CAPP has already scheduled its second teleconference, to be conducted with planning grant recipients, and has begun exploring uses of computer conferencing and other technologies to strengthen its communications with academic partnerships in California.